

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A computer-implemented method, comprising:

using a graphical user interface (GUI) to display a representation of a condition of a  
5 user-defined rule that may be used to process textual information, wherein the condition  
includes an attribute name, an operator, and an attribute value; and

upon receipt of input from a user via the GUI, creating a rule template having a  
condition that is based upon the condition of the user-defined rule, wherein the condition of  
the rule template includes the attribute name and the operator from the corresponding  
10 condition of the user-defined rule, and wherein the condition of the rule template further  
includes an attribute-value placeholder that is associated with the attribute value from the  
corresponding condition of the user-defined rule.

2. The computer-implemented method of claim 1, wherein the method further comprises  
15 storing the rule template in a repository that is accessible to the user.

3. The computer-implemented method of claim 1, wherein the user-defined rule  
contains a plurality of conditions that each include an attribute name, an operator, and an  
attribute value.

4. The computer-implemented method of claim 3, wherein the conditions of the user-  
defined rule are connected by at least one logical operator.

5. The computer-implemented method of claim 3, wherein the rule template contains a  
25 plurality of conditions that each correspond to one of the conditions of the user-defined rule  
and that each include the attribute name and the operator from the corresponding condition of  
the user-defined rule.

6. The computer-implemented method of claim 5, wherein the conditions of the rule  
30 template are connected by at least one logical operator.

7. The computer-implemented method of claim 1, wherein the attribute-value placeholder in the condition of the rule template includes at least one placeholder symbol and a placeholder name.

8. The computer-implemented method of claim 7, wherein the placeholder name is based on the attribute name of the corresponding condition of the user-defined rule.

9. The computer-implemented method of claim 1, wherein the user-defined rule may be used to process textual information contained in email messages or in search queries.

10. A computer-implemented method, comprising:  
using a graphical user interface (GUI) to display a representation of an action of a user-defined rule that may be used to process textual information, wherein the action includes an action name and a value; and

upon receipt of input from a user via the GUI, creating a rule template having an action that is based upon the action of the user-defined rule, wherein the action of the rule template includes the action name from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule, and wherein the action of the rule template further includes a value placeholder that is associated with the value from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule.

11. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, wherein the action of the user-defined rule further includes an attribute name and an attribute value, wherein the action of the rule template includes the attribute name from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule, and wherein the action of the rule template further includes an attribute-value placeholder that is associated with the attribute value from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule.

12. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, wherein the method further comprises storing the rule template in a repository that is accessible to the user.

13. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, wherein the user-defined rule contains a plurality of actions that each include an action name and a value.

14. The computer-implemented method of claim 13, wherein the rule template contains a plurality of actions that each correspond to one of the actions of the user-defined rule and that each include the action name from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule.

15. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, wherein the value placeholder in the action of the rule template includes at least one placeholder symbol and a placeholder name.

16. The computer-implemented method of claim 15, wherein the placeholder name is based on the action name of the corresponding action of the user-defined rule.

17. The computer-implemented method of claim 10, wherein the user-defined rule may be used to process textual information contained in email messages or in search queries.

18. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions contained therein for performing a method, the method comprising:

using a graphical user interface (GUI) to display a representation of a condition of a user-defined rule that may be used to process textual information, wherein the condition includes an attribute name, an operator, and an attribute value; and

upon receipt of input from a user via the GUI, creating a rule template having a condition that is based upon the condition of the user-defined rule, wherein the condition of the rule template includes the attribute name and the operator from the corresponding condition of the user-defined rule, and wherein the condition of the rule template further includes an attribute-value placeholder that is associated with the attribute value from the corresponding condition of the user-defined rule.

19. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions contained therein for performing a method, the method comprising:

using a graphical user interface (GUI) to display a representation of an action of a user-defined rule that may be used to process textual information, wherein the action includes an action name and a value; and

upon receipt of input from a user via the GUI, creating a rule template having an action that is based upon the action of the user-defined rule; wherein the action of the rule template includes the action name from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule, and wherein the action of the rule template further includes a value placeholder that is associated with the value from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule.

20. A system programmed to:

use a graphical user interface (GUI) to display a representation of a condition of a user-defined rule that may be used to process textual information, wherein the condition includes an attribute name, an operator, and an attribute value; and

upon receipt of input from a user via the GUI, create a rule template having a condition that is based upon the condition of the user-defined rule, wherein the condition of the rule template includes the attribute name and the operator from the corresponding condition of the user-defined rule, and wherein the condition of the rule template further includes an attribute-value placeholder that is associated with the attribute value from the corresponding condition of the user-defined rule.

21. A system programmed to:

use a graphical user interface (GUI) to display a representation of an action of a user-defined rule that may be used to process textual information, wherein the action includes an action name and a value; and

upon receipt of input from a user via the GUI, create a rule template having an action that is based upon the action of the user-defined rule, wherein the action of the rule template includes the action name from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule, and wherein the action of the rule template further includes a value placeholder that is associated with the value from the corresponding action of the user-defined rule.